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Chapter 1. Entrepreneurial Risk: *Hamlet*

Introduction

During the 1980s, Sir Keith Joseph was the UK's Secretary of State for Education. Known as the 'mad monk',¹ Joseph played a central role in the neoliberal transformation of the Conservative Party under Margaret Thatcher, to whom he introduced the works of F.A. Hayek, and was considered to be 'a Saint or Satan'² depending on one's political outlook. Joseph's philosophy of education was informed by his fascination with entrepreneurialism, which he shared with other notable figures of the day such as John Kao of Harvard Business School and the US writer Ayn Rand. Joseph's biographers, Andrew Denham and Mark Garnett, record Joseph's admiration for the man or woman who 'begins with nothing' and achieves apparently magical success; a 'mystery' explored in one of his last speeches where he mused, 'They do not come because of good education and they do not come of good birth. They do not come because of happy homes or unhappy homes. We do not know how they come...'³ Joseph's anti-cultural theory of entrepreneurialism was curiously at odds with his hatred for Jean-Jacques Rousseau's theory of 'natural' education, which he believed had encouraged twentieth century teachers 'to dispense with the structured systems of learning which have been so successful in the past' and promoted the belief 'that a permissive society is a civilised society'.⁴ In Chapter Two of this book I discuss the attempt to eradicate progressive education in the UK and North America, and as a prelude to that discussion this current chapter considers the impulse *towards* that endeavour by asking, 'Who is this 'entrepreneur' so beloved of neoliberals? How is her power non-attributable to her genes, her upbringing or her education, yet potentially nullified by the "permissive society"?'

In seeking to untangle this central knot of neoliberal philosophy, I offer a reading of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, whose eponymous hero is described by A.P. Rossiter as 'the first modern man'.⁵ According to Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet* marks an 'epochal shift'⁶ not only in Shakespeare's writing, but in Western drama itself. By employing 'dramatic poetry and prose of unprecedented intensity'⁷ in this play, Shakespeare introduced a 'whole new kind of literary subjectivity'⁸ based on the feeling of being inside a character's psyche. This subjectivity inspired the Shakespeare cult of the Romantic era,⁹ when the idea of transcendence through introspection exploded the Enlightenment

¹ Denham, A. & Garnett, M. (2001) *Keith Joseph*. Chesham: Acumen Publishing Limited. p. xi.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid: 9.

⁴ Ibid: 262.

⁵ Rossiter, A.P. (1961: 187) *Angel With Horns and Other Shakespeare Lectures*. New York: Theatre Arts Books.

⁶ Greenblatt, S. (1997: 1661) Introduction to *Hamlet*. In: *The Norton Shakespeare*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. pp. 1659-1667.

⁷ Ibid: 1661.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Holbrook, P. (2010) *Shakespeare's Individualism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

notion of rationality as the pre-eminent guide to human action. Hamlet's tortuous soul-searching provided the template for Romantic depictions of social misfits, such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, and established the literary trope of the sensitive thinker struggling to cope in a world of phlegmatic doers. At first glance, *Hamlet* appears an unlikely blueprint for the neoliberal "go-getter", yet it paved the way for both Romantic mysticism and the rejection of this route of travel in the form of Rand's Market-Romantic philosophy, and the play's depiction of rationality and tradition arguably provides a useful lens through which to scrutinise neoliberal theory on volition and entrepreneurialism.

Hamlet

Hamlet reveals the chasm between the worlds of the 'warrior-king and modern humanist'¹⁰ and thus gives epic scale to the issue of volition. These worlds collide most forcibly when the ghost of Hamlet's father appears before his grieving son dressed in full battle armour and discloses that his brother murdered him to steal the crown and marry Hamlet's mother. Deeply impressed by his father's clamorous demand for remembrance and retaliation, Hamlet vows to forget the precepts of humanism acquired through study at Wittenberg University, declaring:

Yea, from the table of my memory
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past
That youth and observation copied there,
And thy commandment all alone shall live
Within the book and volume of my brain,
Unmix'd with baser matter. (1.5.98-104)

This promise proves easier to make than keep. Instead of getting on with the business of revenge, Hamlet finds himself enthusiastically recalling lines from classical drama with a troupe of actors, and is subsequently plunged into a fit of self-loathing, proclaiming, 'O vengeance! / Why, what an ass am I!' (2.2.579-580) In spite of his vow to forsake the arts and his disgust at his own vacillation, Hamlet goes on to philosophise that the apparition of his father may have been a devil conjured 'Out of my weakness and my melancholy' (2.2.599), and decides to test his uncle's guilt by staging a pantomime of his father's murder, thereby further delaying the act of retaliation. Appearing before his son a second time, the ghost of Hamlet's father urges remembrance saying, 'Do not forget! This visitation / Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose' (3.4.111-112). Hamlet's soliloquies reveal however, not that he has forgotten his murderous mission, but that he finds it difficult to think without employing methods cultivated through humanist study. We might, of course, agree with Hamlet that it is *reasonable* to test the hypothesis that the ghost is a devil sent to trick him, and indeed the wisdom of such careful reflection is brought home to us at the close of the drama, when we witness Laertes blundering towards his own demise without considering, in advance of action, the possibility that he is

¹⁰ Ibid:77.

being manipulated by the king. Nevertheless, Hamlet's prevarication proves ruinous, and the phlegmatic Fortinbras, who is impervious to the political balderdash that undermines Laertes's chance of power, claims the crown of Denmark with a flourish of chivalric honour that calls to mind the historic seizure of this same land by Hamlet's warrior-father.

Reason and volition

Hamlet is torn between honouring filial obligations and choosing his own values, and however much this "choice" is limited by his prior conditioning, his predicament is illustrative of, and indeed emanates from, his capacity for reason. The nature of this uniquely human capacity is one of the central preoccupations of neoliberal philosophy, and arguably the most interesting writer on this topic is Ayn Rand. In *The Romantic Manifesto*, published in 1969, Rand defines Romanticism as a category of art based on the recognition of our capacity for volition, and she argues that the exercise of free will is a moral act.¹¹ Arguably, Rand's use of the term 'Romantic' is problematic, as the nineteenth century Romantic movement was informed by the belief, which Peter Holbrook claims Shakespeare shared with Montaigne and Machiavelli, that reason is of limited help in choosing among values because our 'ultimate values'¹² are often incompatible. This limitation is rejected by Rand, who contrasts *her* brand of Romanticism with "immoral" Naturalism, arguing that exponents of the latter believe that our choices are constrained by forces beyond our control, and that the moral agent is not therefore autonomous. For Rand, Naturalism enervates society by making individuals feel weak, and in her novels she demonstrates her philosophy through the depiction of audacious men and women choosing their values, rather than relying upon social convention or allowing "fate" to guide their action. In addition, Rand discards the old-style Romantic notion that our rationality might be supplemented by supernatural knowledge, arguing that the 'virtue of Rationality'¹³ means 'the rejection of any form of *mysticism*, i.e., any claim to some nonsensory, nonrational, nondefinable, supernatural source of knowledge'.¹⁴ This disinclination to acknowledge the role of mysticism in human affairs is not, of course, limited to neoliberal philosophers such as Rand. The literary theorist Harold Bloom, like his nineteenth-century Romantic predecessors, believes that watching *Hamlet* is an uncanny experience because something about this play seems to both demand and provide 'evidence from some sphere beyond the scope of our senses'.¹⁵ However, Bloom seems to imply that this sphere beyond the scope of our senses is *not* supernatural, but a heightened realm of perception accessed by Shakespeare, who affords us a glimpse of what he sees through Hamlet as his proxy. Thus, Bloom proclaims that consciousness is Hamlet's 'salient characteristic' and that 'he is the most

¹¹ Rand, A. (1975) *The Romantic Manifesto*. (Second Revised Edition). London: Signet, Penguin Books Ltd.

¹² Holbrook (2010: 13).

¹³ Rand (1964) *The Virtue of Selfishness*. New York: Signet. p. 28

¹⁴ Ibid: 28-29. Italics in original.

¹⁵ Bloom, H. (1999) *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. London: Fourth Estate. p. 385.

aware and knowing figure ever conceived',¹⁶ in spite of the fact that Hamlet only discovers the regicide that fuels this drama through the mystical intervention of his dead father. Rand goes further than Bloom by offering an interpretation of Hamlet's most famous soliloquy that positions him squarely as a rational thinker, rather than mystical seer. In her novel, *Atlas Shrugged*, the hero John Galt proclaims that man is a '*volitional consciousness*';¹⁷ a physical entity whose organs function automatically but whose mind must be commanded into action by an effort of will. Without this effort man will die, as he is not born with the knowledge necessary for survival. Consequently, Galt says, 'for *you*, who are a human being, the question 'to be or not to be' is the question 'to think or not to think.'¹⁸ This implies that not to think is to die, but of course this philosophy is quite different from that expressed by Hamlet, who believes that death may open the door to the unwelcome continuation of thought in the form of uncontrollable dreams.

Rand's Objectivist philosophy, which she describes as the moral base of laissez-faire capitalism,¹⁹ is overtly atheist and has proved deeply attractive to individuals longing for decisive answers to questions about the meaning of life in our more secular age.²⁰ Other exponents of marketization have painted portraits of human reasoning that, while less engaging than Rand's "Market Romanticism", perhaps resemble more closely the rationality depicted in *Hamlet*. The US economist, James M. Buchanan, who served as President of the Mont Pelerin Society founded by Friedrich A. Hayek, is best known for his work on public choice theory, which he describes as 'policy without romance'.²¹ In *The Limits of Liberty*, published in 1975, Buchanan displays unabashed pragmatism over human relations, arguing that 'We live together because social organization provides the efficient means of achieving our objectives and not because society offers us a means of arriving at some transcendental common bliss'.²² This conjecture calls to mind Hamlet's rejection of humanity as a source of comfort when he tells his erstwhile friends, 'Man delights not me – nor woman neither' (2.2.309). For Hamlet, the social organisation of the Danish court of Elsinore provides neither 'common bliss' nor the efficient means of achieving his objectives; indeed it thwarts them through constant surveillance (*for more discussion of surveillance, see Chapter Two*).

Buchanan argues that a social system that denies self-actualisation cannot be justified on the spurious grounds that it offers spiritual communion, but he firmly rejects anarchism as an alternative to the kind of 'prison' structure that Hamlet rails against (2.2.243). Using the analogy of Robin Hood and Little John meeting in the middle of a one-man footbridge, Buchanan argues that there is no

¹⁶ Ibid: 404.

¹⁷ Rand, A. (2007) *Atlas Shrugged*. London: Penguin Books Ltd. p. 1012. Italics in original.

¹⁸ Ibid. Italics in original.

¹⁹ Rand (1964).

²⁰ Burns, J. (2011) *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

²¹ Shuggart II, W.F. (2008) *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Economics: Public Choice*. Available online at: <http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/PublicChoice.html> [Accessed 23rd September 2015].

²² Buchanan, J.M. (2000) *The Limits of Liberty: Between Anarchy and Leviathan*. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund Inc. p. 3

“natural” rule to determine who is entitled to proceed and who must withdraw: ‘The genuinely anarchistic world becomes a maze of footbridges, and conflict rather than universalized cooperation is its central feature’.²³ Hamlet seems to personify this conflict when he finds relief from inertia through impetuous action, randomly stabbing Polonius through a curtain and sending Guildenstern and Rosencrantz to their deaths. To borrow from Buchanan, Hamlet assaults people who are blocking his path on a metaphorical one-man footbridge, and in so doing he violates what Rand describes as the basic political principle of the Objectivist ethic that no person may *initiate* the use of physical force against another.²⁴ Buchanan, however, denies the possibility of a universal ethic, and argues that the pursuit of individual gain is rational and entirely to be expected, and must therefore be moderated through legislation. For Buchanan, laissez-faire capitalism, with its focus on individual rights and the freedom to make voluntary contracts, is the surest means to both resist anarchy and limit the scope of totalitarian collective power. Even a ‘romantic revolutionary’²⁵ would, he says, prefer order over chaos, and might even acknowledge that ‘all members of a community secure gains when rights are defined’.²⁶ Thus while Rand argues that our capacity for reason defines us as human and that exercising free choice in the market society enables us to fully realise our humanity, Buchanan adopts a non-Romantic position, arguing that the definition of property rights is the instrument through which a person is initially defined, and that the market mechanism is simply the most efficient means of limiting coercion.

In spite of the broad appeal of Rand and Buchanan’s ideas, it was arguably Hayek’s theory that established the central ground of neoliberal policy. In *The Constitution of Liberty*, published in 1960, Hayek devotes a chapter to ‘Freedom, Reason and Tradition’, in which he sets out his position on rationality.²⁷ Hayek pulls no punches when arguing in favour of the British empirical tradition over the French rationalist tradition, claiming that ‘the British philosophers laid the foundations of a profound and essentially valid theory, while the rationalist school was simply and completely wrong’.²⁸ Hayek claims that the empiricist and rationalist positions are underpinned by two fundamentally different accounts of the human: the anti-rationalist theory is, he says, ‘closer to the Christian tradition of the fallibility and sinfulness of man’,²⁹ while the rationalist theory is ‘based on the assumption of the individual man’s propensity for rational action and his natural intelligence and goodness’.³⁰ This latter assumption is wrong, he argues, because when making a decision about whether or not to obey rules, we do not know ‘what depends on their being observed in the particular

²³ Ibid: 12.

²⁴ Rand (1964).

²⁵ Buchanan (2000: 212).

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Hayek, F.A. (2011). *The Constitution of Liberty. The Definitive Edition*. Hamowy, R. (ed.) Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

²⁸ Ibid: 112.

²⁹ Ibid: 120.

³⁰ Ibid.

instance'³¹ and cannot therefore rely upon our capacity for reason to guide us. Although Hayek is sceptical of the 'French tradition, with its flattering assumptions about the unlimited powers of human reason',³² he does not propose that our reason might be supplemented by supernatural knowledge. Instead, he borrows from Darwin's theory of evolution to argue in favour of the slow, *organic* growth of social convention through a process of trial and error. As in the natural world, he argues, behaviour in the social world is moderated through the "natural selection" of actions that lead to favourable results over time. Hayek claims that the decision to adhere to a moral code 'must be regarded as a value in itself, a sort of intermediate end which we must pursue without questioning its justification in the particular case'.³³ In subsequent work Hayek went on to state that ethical rules are tacit and acquired through imitation, and that the family plays a central role in cultivating the virtues that have evolved to support the Great Society.³⁴ This philosophy was an anathema to Rand, who believed that ethical truths are objectively knowable and that families risk suffocating this ability by supplanting reason with unthinking filial duty.³⁵ Buchanan was also sceptical of Hayek's theory of social evolution, arguing that 'the institutions that survive and prosper need not be those that maximise man's potential. Evolution may produce social dilemma as readily as social paradise'.³⁶

Charisma and the entrepreneur

The difficulty of reconciling filial duty with the desire for self-determination is central to *Hamlet*, and when considering the Danish court in evolutionary terms we would certainly struggle to describe it as a 'social paradise'. In order to explore the role accorded to tradition in *Hamlet*, it is perhaps helpful to consider Max Weber's analysis of charisma in *Economy and Society*, published posthumously in 1922.³⁷ We might note here two claims made by Weber that are significant for our study of *Hamlet* and the neoliberal entrepreneur: first that charisma disrupts rational rule, and second that it disrupts tradition, making his definition of charisma antithetical to both Rand's vision of the heroic rationalist and Hayek's vision of the dynamic free market underpinned by tradition. Weber claims that bureaucracy and patriarchy are both 'oriented toward the satisfaction of calculable needs with ordinary, everyday means',³⁸ and that extraordinary needs are satisfied on a *charismatic* basis. Thus, two distinct types of need are met through what might be described as a process of regulation and innovation. The bureaucratic or paternalistic figure of authority ("the regulator") is located in a pre-existing control structure: as long as the structure holds and the individual complies with traditional

³¹ Ibid: 128.

³² Ibid: 108.

³³ Ibid: 128.

³⁴ Horwitz, S. (2005) 'Two Worlds at Once: Rand, Hayek and the Ethics of Micro- and Macro-cosmos' *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies*, 6 (2) pp. 375-403.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Buchanan (2000: 211).

³⁷ Weber, M. (1978) *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. London: University of California Press, Ltd.

³⁸ Ibid: 1111.

expectations of behaviour, his or her claim to authority is assured. The charismatic figure (“the innovator”) is located outside this control structure and demonstrates extraordinary abilities which we are *compelled* to recognise: if these abilities are tested and found wanting, his or her claim to authority vanishes. Weber argues that charisma ‘disrupts rational rule as well as tradition altogether and overturns all notions of sanctity’.³⁹ According to Weber, this charismatic disruption *enhances* our culture, as ‘Instead of reverence for customs that are ancient and hence sacred, it enforces the inner subjection to the unprecedented and absolutely unique and therefore Divine’.⁴⁰ Instead of evolution, it is revolution that Weber hails: ‘In this purely empirical and value-free sense charisma is indeed the specifically creative revolutionary force of history’.⁴¹ Weber’s theory that creativity is dependent upon freedom from the rule of reason and tradition constitutes a direct challenge to Hayek’s claim that stability through time-honoured tradition is the foundation of a free and vibrant society. Perhaps most strikingly, Weber’s theory that charisma is non-economic seems to undermine the rational basis of the free market, as he claims that the charismatic prophet and pirate are equally oblivious to everyday rules and conventions, in spite of their diverse views on the accrual of wealth.

If we find Weber’s definition of charisma persuasive, we may decide that Hamlet’s father is charismatic because he seized power through a display of valour, rather than diplomacy, and allowed Elsinore’s traditions to lapse, so that keeping wassail is ‘a custom/ More honour’d in the breach than the observance’ (1.4.15-16). By this same measure Hamlet is *not* charismatic, as he is desperate to honour traditional filial obligations and is unable to extract himself from the rational rule of Wittenberg scholasticism. This conjecture is troubling, as clearly Hamlet is the hero of this drama; the ‘sweet prince’ (5.2.353) who is loved by his people and mourned by Fortinbras. Furthermore, Hamlet is obviously superior to his abjectly non-charismatic uncle, who literally kills his brother like a snake; revives the aforementioned tradition, and engages in diplomacy rather than warfare. Indeed, we may even concur with Bloom that Hamlet ‘vies with King David and the Jesus of Mark as a charismatic-of-charismatics’.⁴² Weber makes three observations about charisma that are prescient when considering the charismatic status of Hamlet: firstly, charisma is non-economic; secondly, charisma is non-inheritable, and thirdly, charismatic innovation tends to be absorbed into the existing bureaucratic structure and thus rendered non-charismatic. According to Weber:

Every charisma is on the road from a turbulently emotional life that knows no economic rationality to a slow death by suffocation under the weight of material interests: every hour of its existence brings it nearer to this end.⁴³

This process of suffocation has begun long before we first see Hamlet on the stage, dressed in black and wishing that this ‘too too solid flesh would melt’ (1.2.129) and that God ‘had not fix’d / His

³⁹ Ibid: 1117.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Bloom (1999: 384).

⁴³ Weber (1978:1120).

canon 'gainst self-slaughter' (1.2.131-132). Hamlet is *not* like his father, yet while he has not inherited his father's warrior status, he has enjoyed a distinct emotional life as a Wittenberg scholar. This emotional life ended when Hamlet returned to Elsinore, long before the play began, and is over before he agrees to his mother's request to forsake his studies and before he renounces scholasticism in order to avenge his father. This life is recalled wistfully by Hamlet during his interaction with the troupe of actors, prompting the aforementioned fit of self-loathing, and the tragedy of *Hamlet* might therefore be described as the slow and painful absorption of the charismatic hero into the bureaucratic and paternalistic regulation of Elsinore.

Hamlet's struggle with the "Danish regulators" might be said to be akin to the imagined plight of the neoliberal hero, who must likewise defy oppressive state machinery to seek his or her autonomy, and indeed the celebration of the "dare and do" of the entrepreneur is one of most distinctive features of the neoliberal canon. For example, in *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, published in 1974, Robert Nozick argues that entrepreneurs identify and respond to opportunities in the market that others have failed to notice, and are *entitled* to the profit thereby accrued because this additional value has been 'created' by their ingenuity.⁴⁴ In *Power and Market*, published in 1970, Murray N. Rothbard celebrates the social contribution of the entrepreneur: confronting head-on some of the main objections to the free market, Rothbard argues that the problem of security is answered, in part, by the willingness of the capitalist-entrepreneur to 'assume the bulk of the risks of the market and concomitantly relieve laborers of a great deal of risk'.⁴⁵ The libertarian exponent of anarcho-capitalism, Ludwig von Mises, makes a distinction between the entrepreneur and the genius that draws attention to the ubiquity of the former. In *Human Action*, published in 1949, Mises argues that in economics, entrepreneurialism is 'not the particular feature of a special group or class of men; it is inherent in every action and burdens every actor'.⁴⁶ In his last book, *The Ultimate Foundation of Economic Science*, published in 1962, Mises claims that the 'feat of the genius is outside the regular flow of human affairs'.⁴⁷ Under this argument, gifted individuals operate, like Weber's charismatic, outside the sphere of everyday needs and wants, while the entrepreneur is firmly rooted within this sphere, enhancing it for herself and others. 'If Dante, Shakespeare or Beethoven had died in childhood', he says, 'mankind would miss what it owes them',⁴⁸ yet the lingering impression conveyed by Mises is that this loss would be wholly unconscious: it is the *entrepreneur*, rather than the genius, who is the vital everyman of the free market.

⁴⁴ Nozick, J.R. (1974) *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. New York: Basic Books.

⁴⁵ Rothbard, M. (2004) *Man, Economy and State: A Treatise on Economic Principles WITH Power and Market: Government and the Economy*. Auburn, Alabama: The Ludwig von Mises Institute. p. 1313.

⁴⁶ Mises, L.v. (1966) *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics. Third Revised Edition*. Chicago: Henry Regnery Company. pp. 252-253.

⁴⁷ Mises, L.v. (1978) *The Ultimate Foundation of Economic Science: An Essay on Method. Second Edition*. Kansas City: Sheed Andrews and McNeel, Inc. p. 61.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Over the centuries, audiences have observed what Samuel Coleridge describes as Hamlet's 'aversion to action',⁴⁹ making Hamlet an unlikely template for the neoliberal entrepreneur, and indeed the character in *Hamlet* who corresponds most closely to the neoliberals' model of the "universal" entrepreneur is Hamlet's uncle, who embraces risk and thereby wins what he lasciviously describes as, 'My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen' (3.3.55). In pragmatic terms, the fact that Hamlet's uncle is not charismatic is irrelevant, as this trait is superfluous to his purpose. If Weber is correct, charisma satisfies extraordinary needs, and there is nothing more ordinary than sibling rivalry and lust; "needs" that are most fully satisfied by Machiavellian guile (*see Chapter Three*). Nevertheless, Hamlet's capacity for risk-taking is sufficiently suppressed by the regulation of Elsinore to render him a tragic hero for supporters of neoliberalism.

The permissive society

At the start of this chapter, Education Secretary Keith Joseph's disdain for the "permissive society" was noted. If by permissive we mean the kind of anarchic cruelty demonstrated by Hamlet, then we all might agree with Joseph that education should be anti-permissive. Right-wing economists and philosophers, however, identified a far broader spectrum of deviance in their critique of the permissive society that includes left-wing resistance to paternalistic and bureaucratic structures. In so doing, conservatives seemed to imply that only a *specific* form of defiance is heroic. For example, in his retrospective of Britain in the 1960s, Bernard Levin condemned the abandonment of rationality in the quest for certainty, lamenting that during the sixties 'Talismans, charms, amulets and runic stones with wondrous powers abounded'.⁵⁰ This mystical quest was prompted, Levin claims, by a loss of faith in traditional sources of conviction: 'Orthodox religion would not do; authority – political, moral, parental, pedagogical – would not do'.⁵¹ Consequently, health fads, gurus, promiscuity, drug taking and cultural relativism seemed to be the order of the day: in the words of Levin, 'Nothing was sacred'.⁵² and there was 'Panic and emptiness! Panic and emptiness!'.⁵³ Levin's disgust over this apparent decline in prudence was shared by Buchanan and Rand. With characteristic verve, Rand identified a structural cause for the abandonment of reason, proclaiming that 'The products of America's anti-rational, anti-cognitive "Progressive" education, the hippies, are reverting to the music and the drumbeat of the jungle'.⁵⁴ Buchanan was more measured in his appraisal, arguing that young people in the early 1970s did not value order as much as previous generations, and that to their minds the legal structure appeared repressive, as it embodied 'an excess of order relative to liberty of

⁴⁹ Coleridge, S. (1827/1969: 178) 'Hamlet'. In: Hawkes, T. (ed.) *Coleridge on Shakespeare*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd. pp. 157-185.

⁵⁰ Levin, B. (1970) *The Pendulum Years: Britain and the Sixties*. London: Pan Books Ltd. p. 30.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid: 324.

⁵³ Ibid: 314.

⁵⁴ Rand (1975: 54)

persons'.⁵⁵ It is immediately apparent that these two positions mirror Rand and Buchanan's respective stance on rationality: the permissive society is one in which wisdom, for whatever reason, has been forsaken.

In his analysis of the 1960s, Gerard DeGroot appears frustrated by the naiveté of the hippies, who thought that it might be possible to escape the drudgery of alienated work and inhabit a 'storybook world'⁵⁶ outside the capitalist system. However, in spite of DeGroot's observation that the directive to 'Turn on, tune in, drop out'⁵⁷ was hazardous to many Western teenagers, who ran away from home in pursuit of nirvana and found instead only squalor and drug dependency, the rejection of life in our mechanistic culture is not easily dismissed as irrational.⁵⁸ Indeed, the idea that the West was undergoing a cultural decline was viewed as an undeniable truth by many on both the Left and Right of the political spectrum. For example, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, published in 1947, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer argued that the mechanism of industrialised labour had been replicated in the amusements offered under late capitalism.⁵⁹ We are, they claimed, bombarded by advertisements as we walk down a street, read a newspaper or visit the cinema, and our free time is thus a 'prolongation of work'⁶⁰ as we frantically attempt to model our lives according to the dictates of capitalist manufacturers. In the 1950s, Guy Debord encouraged resistance to the machine society, envisioning a 'battle of leisure' between members of the Situationist International who aimed to 'multiply poetic subjects and objects' and the culture industry, with its 'televised imbecilities' that prevent the development of 'political consciousness'.⁶¹ Rand was likewise contemptuous of cultural imbecilities, which she saw as endemic in American society, but she identified a political, rather than economic, reason for their existence. In her novel, *The Fountainhead*, published in 1943, Rand implies that the "dumbing down" of culture is a left-wing conspiracy to undermine our capacity for reason and, by extension, our humanity.⁶² According to Rand, the forces of totalitarianism seek to homogenise individuals by robbing us of our ability to perceive anything that transcends the mundane and denying our ability to be transcendent. No longer able to hear 'thunder',⁶³ she says, we inhabit a diminished world where individuals seek 'mindless "kicks"' in order to 'find a moment's relief from their chronic state of terror'.⁶⁴ For right-wing thinkers such as Rand, the enemy was not the corporation selling products to enhance individuals' subjectivity, but the ideologue preaching an anti-individualistic doctrine of fraternity underpinned by universal banality. According to this perspective,

⁵⁵ Buchanan (2011: 162).

⁵⁶ DeGroot, G. (2008) *The 60s Unplugged: A Kaleidoscopic History of a Disorderly Decade*. London: Macmillan. p. 249.

⁵⁷ Ibid: 209.

⁵⁸ Adorno, T.W. & Horkheimer, M. (1997) *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Cumming, J. trans.) London: Verso.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid: 137.

⁶¹ Debord, G. (2003: 703) Writings from the Situationist International. In: Harrison, C. & Wood, P. (eds.) *Art in Theory 1900-2000*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 701-7.

⁶² Rand, A. (2007) *The Fountainhead*. London: Penguin Books Ltd.

⁶³ Ibid: 489.

⁶⁴ Rand (1964:31).

the hippies could not possibly find freedom through the adoption of anti-capitalist forms of exchange, as the very notion of the permissive society is a totalitarian trap. Thus, in spite of their diverse views on the limits of rationality, Rand, Buchanan and Hayek shared the conviction that salvation from alienation and dysfunctionality lay not in the rejection of capitalist economic structures, but in the exercise of free choice in the free market.

US conservative and media personality, William F. Buckley, was sufficiently perturbed by the countercultural movement to form a right-wing students' group, Young Americans for Freedom.⁶⁵ Drafted in 1960, the YAF's charter proclaimed that 'In time of moral and political crises, it is the responsibility of the youth of America to affirm certain moral truths...political freedom cannot long exist without economic freedom'.⁶⁶ US economist Milton Friedman echoed this sentiment in *Capitalism and Freedom*, published in 1962, declaring that 'the intellectual descendants of the Philosophical Radicals', including Hayek, were placing their emphasis on 'economic freedom as a means towards political freedom'.⁶⁷ Rand attracted her own coterie of student admirers, who formed Ayn Rand clubs and invited her to visit college campuses, and Jennifer Burns reports that in 1965, Rand turned down more than twenty such requests to lecture at colleges and universities.⁶⁸ The idea of the Randian hero proved irresistible to many students, who were easily persuaded that laissez-faire capitalism, rather than the hippies' pre-industrial paradise, was the "lost cause" that must be revived. However, while Rand's novels and persona were highly engaging, there is probably some truth in DeGroot's assertion that students adopted pro-market sentiments as an act of rebellion against their more moderate parents. This was, though, no mere flirtation with neoliberalism: DeGroot cautions against conceptualising the 1960s simply as an era of permissiveness, as during this decade the architects of the neoliberal future were being schooled in market ideology, away from the media spotlight. 'By paying so much attention to what was happening on Maggie's Farm', he says, 'we failed to notice the emergence of Maggie Thatcher'.⁶⁹

The change in zeitgeist was slow but certain, and by the 1980s, the idea that young people might "drop out" of capitalism to escape the suffocation of paternalistic and bureaucratic structures was considered passé: instead, they were encouraged to conceptualise the capitalist entrepreneur, rather than the anti-capitalist hippy, as the charismatic revolutionary. Business guru John Kao went so far as to argue that 'the rebel or the truth seeker of the 1960s' had become the 'the entrepreneur of the 1980s'.⁷⁰ Harvard duly sponsored its first conference on entrepreneurialism in 1983 in order to discuss

⁶⁵ DeGroot (2008: 244).

⁶⁶ YAF in DeGroot (2008: 244).

⁶⁷ Friedman, M. (2002) *Capitalism and Freedom*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. p.11.

⁶⁸ Burns (2011).

⁶⁹ DeGroot (2008: 450).

⁷⁰ Kao, J. in Ward, S.C. (2013: 114) Creativity, Freedom and the Crash: How the concept of creativity was used as a bulwark against communism during the Cold War, and as a means to reconcile individuals to neoliberalism prior to the Great Recession. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, 11, (3) pp. 110-126.

how entrepreneurialism might be researched and taught, and certain 'Deweyan themes'⁷¹ (see Chapter Two) were married to the neoliberal fascination with market forces to produce enterprise education. According to David Harvey, one of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's 'strong ideas'⁷² was to forge an alliance between businesses and state actors, and UK state schools were duly encouraged to form links with businesses in order for pupils to gain hands-on experience of the free market economy. In the USA, Michael Apple identified a similar ethos, noting that work experience programmes had been established across the states to help educators 'teach for the needs of industry'.⁷³

The wish to bear risk

The belief that the entrepreneurial "wish to bear risk" is fundamentally heroic informs neoliberal economic theory, which states that business managers exercise choice in order to maximise utility (growth; stability; profit) for selfish reasons (personal wealth; power).⁷⁴ It is advantageous, therefore, to be a business leader rather than an employee in the free market, as only the self-interest of a CEO is aligned with decision-making, and asymmetric power structures are justified on the grounds that the entrepreneur is willing to bear risk on behalf of herself and others. To reward and encourage individual risk, successive neoliberal governments have passed laws that favour the interests of business leaders and penalise workers by deregulating commerce, weakening the trade unions, and lowering the taxes of the super-rich.⁷⁵ It has become commonplace for large firms to acquire smaller businesses through hostile takeovers and to then asset-strip those companies, leaving staff demoralised or redundant,⁷⁶ yet the entrepreneur's pursuit of self-interest is admired, rather than vilified, by government. For example in the 1990s, UK Trade and Industry Secretary Peter Mandelson proclaimed that, 'We want a society that celebrates and values its business heroes as much as it does its pop stars and footballers'.⁷⁷ Economists have provided a moral argument to justify the wealth and status enjoyed by these 'business heroes'. For example, Nozick argues that in a socialist society, there is no way to 'divest oneself'⁷⁸ of the risks of the enterprise one works in, and it is therefore churlish to complain about the wealth enjoyed in capitalist societies by the entrepreneurs who carry this risk on our behalf. According to the precepts of neoliberalism, no one is given "special favour", as the wages for different activities are simply the outcome of the *impersonal* market forces of supply and demand, and according to the marginal productivity theory of income distribution, 'you're worth what you can

⁷¹ Fairfield, P. (2009) *Education After Dewey*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group.

⁷² Harvey, D. (2009) *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 76.

⁷³ Apple, M. (1995) *Education and Power. Second Edition*. London: Routledge. p. 126.

⁷⁴ Hill, R., & Myatt, T. (2010) *The Economics Anti-textbook: A critical thinker's guide to microeconomics*. London: Zed Books.

⁷⁵ Harvey, D. (2009) *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁷⁶ Peston, R. (2008) *Who Runs Britain?* London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd.

⁷⁷ Mandelson, P. (1998) In: Elliot, L. & Atkinson, D. (2007) *Fantasy Island: Waking up to the Incredible Economic, Political and Social Illusions of the Blair Legacy*. London: Constable & Robinson Ltd. p. 47.

⁷⁸ Nozick (1974: 256). Italics in original.

get'.⁷⁹ Presumably, we are all equally free to become the next business hero or popstar in the capitalist state.

Celebration of the pursuit of self-interest has entered education via the discourse of meritocracy, which states that in a free market individuals may choose to gain a competitive advantage over one another through the accrual of credentials. Allegedly, in a meritocracy we are all free to make the most of our talents, and individuals who use their credentials to gain entry to elite universities, such as Cambridge and Harvard, and the top professions, such as investment banking and corporate law, deserve to live in 'gratuitous affluence'.⁸⁰ When stressing the relationship between education and "getting what you are worth", politicians have tended to conflate the willingness to bear risk with the "rational" acceptance of non-charismatic regulation, and to position what Weber describes as 'individually differentiated conduct'⁸¹ as non-entrepreneurial and therefore dysfunctional. Consider, for example, the warning issued by UK Prime Minister Tony Blair:

Show me an educated youngster and I see someone with great prospects; show me school leavers with no qualifications – who still, deplorably, account for nearly one in ten of 16-year-olds – and I see lives of constant struggle and insecurity.⁸²

W. Norton Grubb and Marvin Lazerson note that in many countries including the USA and the UK, students have responded to such warnings by adopting what they describe as a 'highly utilitarian and credentialist' outlook.⁸³ utilitarian in that they view education solely as a means to future employment, and credentialist in that they focus on 'accumulating the credentials they think necessary, rather than the learning that credentials are supposed to represent'.⁸⁴ This obsession with credentials has prompted schools to focus on ends (credentials) rather than means (the development of understanding). In the words of Philip Brown, 'We are creating hordes of smart conformists. They know what they have to do to get ahead, but they have little understanding of why they do what they are doing.'⁸⁵ In 2008, the problem of "teaching to the test" was officially recognised by a UK House of Commons Select Committee, which found that a 'variety of classroom practices aimed at improving test results had distorted the education of some children',⁸⁶ and that teachers in both primary and secondary schools were impairing pupils' understanding and enjoyment of subjects by focussing on routine exercises and exam preparation. James Ryan has identified a similar problem in

⁷⁹ Hill & Myatt (2010: 169).

⁸⁰ Brown, P. (2006: 395) 'The Opportunity Trap' In: Lauder, H., Brown, P., Dillabough, J.-A. & Halsey, A.H. (eds.) *Education, Globalization & Social Change*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 381-397.

⁸¹ Weber (1978: 1156).

⁸² Blair, T. (1998) *The Third Way: New Politics for the New Century*. London: The Fabian Society. p. 10.

⁸³ Grubb, W.N. & Laverson, M. (2006: 301) 'The Globalization of Rhetoric and Practice: The Education Gospel and Vocationalism' In: Lauder, H., Brown, P., Dillabough, J.-A. & Halsey, A.H. (eds.) *Education, Globalization & Social Change*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 295-307.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Brown, P. (2006: 393) 'The Opportunity Trap' In: Lauder, H., Brown, P., Dillabough, J.-A. & Halsey, A.H. (eds.) *Education, Globalization & Social Change*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 381-397.

⁸⁶ The Children, Schools and Families Committee (2008) *Testing and Assessment*. London: The Stationery Office Limited. p.3.

the USA, where American teachers have responded to the pressure to raise test scores by teaching the knowledge and skills that will be tested, and 'ignoring more complex aspects of subjects, and some subjects altogether'.⁸⁷

Under neoliberalism, governments are encouraged to take market friendly action to ameliorate market imperfections,⁸⁸ and education policy has therefore become a major focus of activity for politicians who would like to ensure maximum employment and national prosperity, but are prohibited from making direct interventions in the economy by the precepts of neoliberalism. In the words of UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, education is 'the best economic policy we have'.⁸⁹ In theory, neoliberalism liberates the individual from collective responsibility for risk and cultivates entrepreneurial self-actualisation. In practice, argues Brown, it has led to the emergence of a 'zero-sum game' of employability,⁹⁰ in which the winners take most, if not all, of the opportunities available in the free market. Instead of consoling the "losers" in this game, politicians have tended to heighten the perception of individual risk. For example, the ex-head of the CBI and former New Labour minister, Lord Digby Jones, is reported to have claimed that the government should 'starve the jobless back to work' and that anyone who refuses three job offers should be forced to 'live in a hostel on subsistence rations'.⁹¹ Understandably, such rhetoric has stoked parents' fears over their children's pursuit of credentials, and in 2010 the UK relationships counselling body, Relate, announced that it was offering guidance to families on how to cope with stress over their children's GCSEs, A levels and university finals.⁹²

The "mitigation of risk" through education is the expression of a much wider economic strategy that places nation states under a similar level of stress to that experienced by individual scholars. As in all market systems, educational interventions to support the economy are dependent upon information about imperfections in the school system, and the gathering of such data has been facilitated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), a US backed multilateral agency which, along with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, has promoted neoliberal ideology across the world.⁹³ In 2000, the OECD's first PISA report was administered.⁹⁴ The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an international

⁸⁷ Ryan, J. (2012) *Struggling for Inclusion: Educational Leadership in a Neoliberal World*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, Inc. p. 32.

⁸⁸ Lapavistas, S. (2005) Mainstream Economics in the Neoliberal Era. In: Saad-Filho, A. & Johnson, D. (Eds.) *Neoliberalism: A Critical Reader* (30-40). London: Pluto Press. p. 37.

⁸⁹ Blair, T. in Barber, M. (1997) *The Learning Game*. London: Indigo. p. 46.

⁹⁰ Brown (2006: 394).

⁹¹ Jones, D. cited in Seymour, R. (2010) *The Meaning of David Cameron*. Ropley: O-Books. Shakespeare. pp. 59-60.

⁹² Asthana, A. (2010) 'Parents offered counselling over exam tensions' *The Observer* 30th May 2010, p. 6.

⁹³ Connolly, R. (2013) Have you ever considered a career in total revolution? Drama and the corporate reform of higher education. *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 33 (2), 225-243.

⁹⁴ NCES (2013) Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). Retrieved 28th November, 2013 from: <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pisa/>

assessment that measures 15-year-old students' functional skills in reading, mathematics and science, and this measurement and comparison is justified on the grounds that citizens' functional skills have a direct bearing on national economies. For example, in 2011 the OECD reported that 'the link between education and productivity is very strong' and that 'one extra year of average education leads to an average increase in steady-state long term output per capita by about 4 to 7%'.⁹⁵ Entrepreneurial risk is, then, carried by the individual, and national prosperity is an aggregate of individuals' success in the zero-sum game identified by Brown, making investment in education a top priority for governments desperate to cultivate the "right" players in this game.

By identifying pupils as components of an economic system, the OECD locates them in the same paternalistic and bureaucratic structure that Weber identifies as antithetical to charisma. Indeed, the OECD's methodology is highly reminiscent of the measurement process critiqued by Weber in the 1920s. According to Weber:

With the help of suitable methods of measurement, the optimum profitability of the individual worker is calculated like that of any material of production. On this basis, the American system of "scientific management" triumphantly proceeds with its rational conditioning and training of work performances...discipline inexorably takes over ever larger areas as the satisfaction of political and economic needs is increasingly rationalized. This universal phenomenon more and more restricts the importance of charisma and of individually differentiated conduct.⁹⁶

Action that 'restricts the importance of charisma and of individually differentiated conduct' seems to be incompatible with the neoliberal conception of the heroic entrepreneur, yet neoliberal education policy appears to be designed with this restriction in mind. This contradiction was perhaps inevitable, as by seeking to identify entrepreneurialism as a universal expression of rationality that supports the day-to-day function of the economy, economists such as Mises have rendered entrepreneurialism non-charismatic, and have positioned the entrepreneur as yet another "regulator" in a system that seeks to nullify charismatic opposition and creative revolution. Robert Peston has expressed concern over the hedge-fund and private equity 'brain drain' of talented young people who have opted for careers in finance in preference to more socially useful and creative endeavours,⁹⁷ presumably because they subscribe to the belief that "You are worth what you can get", rather than the belief that "Some things are worth doing". What is perhaps of greater concern is the tacit assumption, expressed by politicians such as Mandelson, that we should *admire* regulators, whose authority is derived from their position in a system that oppresses dissent.

Conclusion

⁹⁵ Gurria, A. (2011) *Skills for the 21 century: from lifetime employment to lifetime employability*. Remarks by Angel Gurría, OECD Secretary-General, delivered at the Joint Vienna Institute. Retrieved 27th November, 2015 from:

<http://www.oecd.org/employment/skillsforthe21centuryfromlifetimeemploymenttolifetimeemployability.htm>

⁹⁶ Weber (1978: 1156).

⁹⁷ Peston, R. (2008) *Who Runs Britain?* London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd. p. 193.

In the 1970s, Nozick called for a 'minimal state' that recognises our rights and allows us 'to choose our life and to realize our ends and our conception of ourselves, insofar as we can, aided by the voluntary cooperation of other individuals possessing the same dignity'.⁹⁸ Instead of achieving this neoliberal utopia, we have, it seems, come closer to the totalitarian model reviled by writers such as Rand. As James Marshall puts it:

...the demands of performativity mean not the pursuit of educational ideals, like personal autonomy, or emancipation but, instead, the subsumption of education under the demands of efficiency for the total social system.⁹⁹

To understand why neoliberalism has failed in this manner we need look no further than the arguments against the permissive society outlined earlier in this chapter. The "irrationality" of the countercultural movement was, ultimately, intolerable to many exponents of laissez-faire capitalism, who, in spite of their diverse opinions on the limits of rationality, set great store by the exercise of reason in the free market. Consequently, the idea of self-actualisation through the expression of free choice in the market society has become so closely aligned in the neoliberal imagination with rational calculation that the scope for the expression of charismatic imaginative play has been severely curtailed. In spite of neoliberal policy makers' professed fascination with the heroic individual, neoliberalism is delivering to students across the world the emotional life not of Hamlet the charismatic scholar, but of Elsinore, the total social system.

⁹⁸ Nozick (1974: 334).

⁹⁹ Marshall, J.D. (1999: 310) 'Performativity: Lyotard and Foucault Through Searle and Austin' *Studies in Philosophy and Education*. 18 pp. 309-317.